



Michigan Supreme Court  
State Court Administrative Office

## Case File Management Standards

### AREA 3: Forms and Reports

#### 3.1: Management

In order to improve forms and reports design, stem the proliferation of forms, and control costs, a forms and reports management program is helpful. The State Court Administrative Office has a statewide forms program which focuses primarily on the analysis and design stages of forms management. The result is the development of standardized court forms and reports for statewide use. [MCR 8.103(5), (9)]

Trial courts who develop their own forms should consider operating a forms management program which focuses on the following three aspects of forms: 1) management which is the overall control and procurement of forms; 2) analysis of information needs in order to design the most effective form for each specific application; and 3) forms design which is the art of devising a form to efficiently service a given function or systems need. Courts who use the SCAO Approved forms, should still consider a forms management program to help in overall control and procurement of forms.

Component 32	Phases of File Management Where Used
Forms and Reports Management	Case initiation, maintenance, disposition to closing, post-adjudication

### Standard:

#### Organizing Court Forms:

Organize court forms by type and case processing phase. The major types of forms are: 1) internal administrative forms; 2) forms prepared and issued by the court; 3) court forms furnished to attorneys and other agencies; 4) court forms furnished to the public; 5) other agency forms used by the court. The processing phases are: 1) case initiation; 2) monitoring active cases; 3) disposition to closing; and 4) post-adjudication. See below for further information about the types of forms and processing phases.

#### Cataloging and Indexing Forms:

Except for the SCAO Approved forms, assign a title and number to each form. Index the forms by form number and title. Include a revision date.

#### Establishing Policies and Procedures for Managing Forms:

Establish policies and procedures for: 1) maintaining files on SCAO approved forms and internally developed forms including indexing and inventory records; 2) purchasing forms; 3) monitoring the usage of forms; and 4) periodic review of each form for needed changes or possible improvements.

**Case File Management Standards**

**3.1:** Management (continued)

<b>Component 32</b> (continued)	<b>Phases of File Management Where Used</b>
Forms and Reports Management	Case initiation, maintenance, disposition to closing, post-adjudication

Internal Administrative Forms:

The following are examples of internal administrative forms.

- The forms used in case initiation include the register of actions, indexes, calendar, scheduling worksheet, receipts, journal, bond.
- The forms used in monitoring active cases include the calendar, exhibit log, bench warrant, receipts, and journal.

Forms Prepared and Issued by the Court:

The following are examples of internally prepared and issued court forms.

- The forms used in case initiation include the judges assignment and receipts.
- The forms used in monitoring active cases include the subpoena, notice to appear, summons, bench warrant, and orders or writs.

Court Forms Furnished to Attorneys and Other Agencies:

The following are examples of forms furnished to attorneys and other agencies.

- The forms used in case initiation include the petition or complaint.
- The forms used in monitoring active cases include the subpoena or notice to appear.
- The forms used in post-adjudication include garnishment, execution, and claim of appeal and other related forms.

Court Forms Furnished to the Public:

The following are examples of forms furnished to the public.

- The forms used in case initiation include the small claims affidavit; pro se forms, and other complaints and petitions.
- The forms used in monitoring active cases include the subpoena, notice to appear, notice of hearing and any other pro se forms the public needs to process a case.
- The forms used in disposition/closing include judgments and other orders the public needs for the case.
- The forms used in post-adjudication include garnishment, execution, and claim of appeal and other related forms.

**Case File Management Standards**

**3.1:** Management (continued)

<b>Component 32</b> (continued)	<b>Phases of File Management Where Used</b>
Forms and Reports Management	Case initiation, maintenance, disposition to closing, post-adjudication

**Requirement to Provide Forms:**

Pursuant to court rule or statute, the courts are required to provide the following forms upon request:

- Forms for small claims proceedings [*MCL 600.8403, MCR 4.302(A)*]
- Forms for landlord-tenant, land contract proceedings [*MCR 4.201*]
- Pro se forms for child support, parenting time, and custody proceedings [*MCL 552.519(3)(k)*]

Pursuant to court rule or statute, the courts are required to provide the following forms **free of charge** upon request of a pro se litigant or indigent defendant:

- Pro se forms for personal protection proceedings [*MCL 600.2950, MCL 600.2950a*]
- Motion for post appeal relief [*MCR 6.502(D)*]

Where a court rule or statute does not already require it, the chief judge may, by administrative order, direct the clerk of the court to provide litigants and attorneys with copies of forms approved by the State Court Administrator. In addition, except when a court rule or statute specifies that the court or clerk of the court must provide certain forms without charge, the administrative order may allow the clerk to provide the forms at a cost of reproduction to the clerk. [*MCR 8.110(C)(7)*] Language regarding provision of forms and charging for the cost of reproduction has been included in Model LAO 8 which has to do with public access to court records.

**Mandating Use of Forms:**

Unless specifically required by statute or court rule, the court may not mandate the use of a specific form, whether SCAO Approved or locally developed.

**Cross References:** For more information about the State Court Administrative Office forms management program, see Section 8-06 of the Michigan Court Administration Reference Guide.



Michigan Supreme Court  
State Court Administrative Office

## Case File Management Standards

### AREA 3: Forms and Reports

#### 3.2: Analysis and Design

Forms analysis and design are important tools in developing accurate, effective, and efficient forms. While most courts do not employ staff specifically to analyze and design forms, there are some standard specifications and design criteria which can aid in the process. In 1984, the Circuit, District, Juvenile, and Probate Court Forms Committees adopted the State Court Administrative Office standard specifications and design criteria for developing SCAO Approved forms. These specifications may be helpful when developing local court forms.

Component 33	Phases of File Management Where Used
Forms Analysis and Design	Not applicable

### Standard:

#### Analysis:

- Develop forms design questions and a checklist to ensure that answers determine the need for a form, how and why the form is used, and possibilities for standardizing the form or combining it with other forms. Questions which should be asked are:
  1. What is the title and form number?
  2. What is the form used for?
  3. Where and by whom is the form prepared (at the counter, in the office, by the public, by court staff, in court, outside the court, etc)?
  4. How is the form prepared (handwritten, typed, word processor, computer printer)?
  5. Physical description of the form (size, color, paper weight)?
  6. How much will the form be handled (a lot, some, seldom)?
  7. Can questions on the form use multiple choice (yes, no)?
  8. What other recurring fill-in data can be pre-printed (e.g. defendant instead of a space for a name)?
  9. Are there any items asked for on the form that can be eliminated?
  10. Estimated annual usage.
  11. Copies normally prepared at one time (1, 2, 3, 4, other).
  12. Normal distribution (court file, plaintiff, defendant, other)
  13. Form should be designed for a single sheet, 2-part, 3-part, 4-part, pad, other.
  14. Other forms containing common information to be considered for combining with this form.

**Case File Management Standards**

**3.2:** Analysis and Design (continued)

<b>Component 33 (continued)</b>	<b>Phases of File Management Where Used</b>
Forms Analysis and Design	Not applicable

15. Should the use of rubber stamps and courts seals be considered for this form (yes, no)? If yes, what?

16. Other questions and considerations: What is the best sequence or grouping of items for each for entering and extracting information? What is the approximate amount of information to be placed in each entry space? If forms are combined for one writing, will certain data be required on undercopies or will different data be added once separated (i.e, register of actions and index cards)?

Technical Design Criteria:

The traditional legal style of forms design uses a “fill-in-the-sentence” type of construction that attempts to combine both static and variable information so that once completed, the form reads in continuous sentences. For many forms, this is the most practical design. However, this traditional design requires 40 to 60 percent more time to prepare than a modern form. If some blanks are not applicable, it becomes cumbersome and confusing for the preparer and reader. These forms often unnecessarily repeat information such as a defendant’s name several times.

Where practical, the use of modern forms design techniques can improve management and clerical efficiency. A feature of modern forms design is the separation of preprinted and variable (fill-in) information. Properly designed forms are simple and largely self-instructional. Variable (fill-in) information is inserted using a box design. Spaces should conform to the amount of information to be inserted.

Forms design standards promote efficiency, save money, and increase professionalism. Standards should assure that all forms produced by a court are consistent in the following respects:

- Paper size: Most forms should be printed on letter size (8 ½ x 11) paper. Exceptions are citations, index cards, etc. [MCR 1.109]
- Form numbering: A workable system should be developed to assign numbers to forms. The form number along with the date designed or revised should appear on all forms in the same location (i.e. lower left corner).
- Form titles should appear on the top of each form and should indicate the form’s purpose.

**Case File Management Standards**

**3.2:** Analysis and Design (continued)

<b>Component 33 (continued)</b>	<b>Phases of File Management Where Used</b>
Forms Analysis and Design	Not applicable

- The space for case number should appear in the same location on all forms, usually the upper right corner.
- Vertical spacing on the form should correspond to typewriter spacing (i.e., 6 lines per inch) and double space as much as possible. If the form is prepared on a computer only, typewriter spacing is not as important. If the form will be filled out by hand, it is helpful to design triple spacing.
- Multipart forms should be considered when the distribution is known (i.e., a three-part form for court file, plaintiff, and defendant). Distribution information for multipart forms should be clearly printed on each part of the form.

**Substantive Design Criteria:**

Clearly delineate the sections of a form to assist in the design process.

- Plain English should be used in court forms. Latin, foreign terms, and legal terminology should be avoided or limited.
- The title and description of the form are at the top where users look first.
- The body of the form contains all of the factual information, which should be grouped for a logical flow. In most court forms, the case title or party names are usually near or at the top on a form.
- Fields requesting social security number or driver license number should not be included with the case title or party names when the form is designed for use in a window envelope. Under MCL 37.252 a state agency or a local governmental unit shall not deliver or cause to be delivered an envelope or package on the outside of which personal information is placed or on the inside of which personal information is placed that is visible from the outside of the envelope or package. Personal information includes social security number and the driver license number (or state identification number if no driver license number). A state agency includes the judicial branch.
- The termination or closing is the last of the three basic parts of the form and is usually for signature and approvals.
- Forms should be designed to be self-explanatory where possible. When extra instructions are necessary, the reverse side or a separate cover sheet should be included.
- When appropriate, use a declaration when a jurat is not specifically required by statute or court rule. [MCR 2.114 and MCR 5.114]

(rev. 5/2001)

**Case File Management Standards**

**3.2:** Analysis and Design (continued)

<b>Component 33 (continued)</b>	<b>Phases of File Management Where Used</b>
Forms Analysis and Design	Not applicable

- Comply with statutes and court rules.

Specifications for Printing Forms:

- Generally court forms that have moderate to high usage should be professionally typeset and printed. Typesetting can employ several very useful forms design techniques such as variable line widths, type sizes, shading, and other special techniques. Overuse of special techniques diminishes their effectiveness.
- Printing of forms produces better copies and does not distort typewriter spacing as do many photocopy machines. Photocopying is also usually more expensive for quantities of forms. Printing of a multi-part form using carbon interleaf or NCR paper is also more economical than printing single sheet forms and photocopying the additional copies needed.
- Consider designing forms such as notices so they can be mailed in window envelopes.

Computer Forms:

- Computer forms require careful design so that input and output forms complement the speed and efficiency computers are intended to promote.
- Input forms should be designed to allow the person entering data to focus on the relevant items of information in a logical sequence consistent with a data entry screen. All information on a form is not normally entered, so use highlight techniques for input forms.
- When using impact printers, preprinted forms are useful for computer output since the selection of type styles and sizes will amplify the variable data printed by the computer printer.
- When using laser printers, consider designing the static information with one type style and programming the input (variable) information with another type style to amplify the variable data.

**Cross References:** For more information about the State Court Administrative Office standard specifications and design criteria, see Section 8-06 of the Michigan Court Administration Reference Guide.

(rev. 5/2001)